

Cable
Text:

UNCLAS NASSAU 00094

SIPDIS
CXNASSAU:

ACTION: NAS

INFO: FBI MLO CGLO OPBAT AMB DCM DEA POL

DISSEMINATION: NAS
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA: DBHARDT
DRAFTED: NAS: DFORAN
CLEARED: CGLO: MFREDIE

VZCZCBHI446

RR RUEHC RUEHDG RUEHPU RUEHWN RUEHKG RUEHSP
RUEHLO RUEHUB RUCOWCV RUCOWCV RHMFISS RUCOWCZ RUEABND RUEABND
RHEHOND RHMFISS RUEABND RUEAWJA RHMFIUU RHMFISS RHEHNSC RHEFDIA
RUEKJCS RUWDQAC RUMIAAA RUEAORD RHEHAAA
DE RUEHBH #0094/01 0321218
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 011218Z FEB 08
FM AMEMBASSY NASSAU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5167
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 2886
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 3595
INFO RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 5660
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 8583
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 4751
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0167
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0544
RUCOWCV/CCGDSEVEN MIAMI FL//D/DRE/DR//
RUCOWCV/COGARD AIRSTA CLEARWATER FL
RHMFISS/COMDT COGARD WASHINGTON DC//CG-ACO-I//
RUCOWCZ/COMLANTAREA COGARD PORTSMOUTH VA//A/AOOI//
RUEABND/DEA DISTRICT OFFICE FT LAUDERDALE
RUEABND/DEA DIVISION OFFICE MIAMI FL
RHEHOND/DIRONDCP WASHINGTON DC//PASS TO USCG//
RHMFISS/DIRJIATF SOUTH
RUEABND/DEA HQS WASHDC
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC
RHMFIUU/HQ USNORTHCOM
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUWDQAC/US INTERDICTION COORD WASHINGTON DC
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL
RUEAORD/USCS AIRBRANCH MIAMI FL
RHEHAAA/WHITEHOUSE WASHDC 0096

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 04 NASSAU 000094

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

INL/LP FOR KEVIN BROWN
WHA/CAR FOR JOSEPH TILGHMAN

E.O. 12958

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TK](#) [UK](#) [BF](#)

SUBJ: AMBASSADOR REVIEWS DRUG AND MIGRANT STRATEGIES IN TRI-LATERAL
MEETINGS IN TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) On December 11-12, 2007, the Ambassador and the Bahamian Minister of State for Immigration traveled to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) at the invitation of its Governor to discuss illegal

migration and narcotics smuggling. The trip coincided with the first port call by U.S. Coast Guard cutters in TCI. During a series of bilateral and trilateral meetings, the U.S., The Bahamas, and the TCI discussed the need to engage with the government of Haiti, ways to improve the exchange of information and intelligence concerning drug and migrant trafficking, agreeing to form a task force to develop protocols for the real time exchange of information and intelligence. They also agreed to cooperate in exchanging information concerning potential terrorist threats and in disaster preparation. The Ambassador offered to host a subsequent round of trilateral discussions in March 2008. Embassy Nassau would welcome the participation of representatives from U.S. Embassies in Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo in this effort to improve information and intelligence sharing on drugs and migrants. End Summary.

BACKGROUND

¶2. (U) On December 11, 2007, the Ambassador accompanied by the DEA Country Attach, Narcotics Affairs Officer (NAO), Operations Bahamas, Turks and Caicos Operations Center Commander and Coast Guard Liaison Officer (CGLLO) traveled to Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos Island (TCI) at the invitation of TCI Governor, Richard Tauwhare to discuss drug and migrant issues. Governor Tauwhare also invited representatives of the Bahamian government. Minister of State for Immigration, Elma Campbell, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Drugs and Crime Officer, Godfrey Rolle, represented the government of The Bahamas. The meeting was scheduled to coincide with the first port call by the U.S. Coast Guard in the Turks and Caicos. U.S. Coast Guard District Seven Commander, Admiral David Kunkel, his Operations Officer and Adjunct traveled to TCI to mark this first port visit and participate in the discussions.

¶3. (SBU) The Ambassador, Admiral Kunkel and their staffs first held a series of bilateral meetings with representatives from TCI followed by a trilateral meeting with representatives from TCI and The Bahamas. TCI Governor Richard Tauwhare, The U.K. Law Enforcement Advisor to the Caribbean, Larry Covington, the U.K. Consul General in Miami, Keith Allen, the U.K. Military Attach, TCI Premier, Michael Misick, Deputy Premier Floyd Hall, Minister of Home Affairs, Gelmo Williams, Attorney General, the Director of Immigration and the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner of Police participated in these meetings. (Note: TCI is a British territory with a Governor appointed by the British government. The Premier and his Cabinet are elected locally. End Note).

TCI: BRITISH OUTPOST ON PATH OF DRUGS AND MIGRANTS

¶4. (SBU) During the bilateral meeting with TCI Governor Tauwhare, the Governor provided an overview of TCI's relations with Great Britain. He noted that when Great Britain granted independence to The Bahamas, TCI was given the choice of joining The Bahamas, becoming independent or remaining a territory, but chose to remain part of Great Britain. Over the years, the British have given the local government as much autonomy as possible. The British remain responsible for security, both internal and external, ensuring good government and maintaining international standards required by treaty and other obligations.

¶5. (SBU) The Governor said that the Premier would like TCI to become independent and that the British government did not oppose independence, but would only grant it after a popular referendum. He mentioned the tensions that exist with the current governing arrangement. The Governor relies on the Premier for funding. Great Britain formerly provided financial assistance to TCI, but this ended in 2005, when TCI became a middle income country. The European Union provides limited support for infrastructure improvements. Tauwhare described the TCI economy, noting that it has enjoyed fifteen percent plus growth rates over the past ten years. It seeks to attract high-end tourism and has recently undergone a building boom in luxury homes and condominiums. He mentioned that a small financial services industry exists and noted that the opposition complained of corruption on the part of the local government. The Governor stated that there was to date no substantiation of corruption and that if there was evidence of

corruption, Britain would investigate.

TCI Preoccupied with Haiti

16. (SBU) In the bilateral meeting with the local government, Premier Misick expressed concern about the stability of Haiti, noting that TCI has suffered an onslaught of illegal Haitian immigrants. He said that Haiti needed investment, not aid, to provide opportunities for its people. In the wake of an incident in March 2006, during which sixty Haitians lost their lives when their sloop overturned while being towed by TCI police, TCI had engaged a team of outside experts to review its Marine Branch. Misick said the team will be making recommendations for improving the Marine Branch's operations. He noted that TCI lacked equipment to patrol its waters and training for its police force. Misick emphasized that his goal was to ensure the safety of TCI, and he pledged to fight drugs, crime and money laundering. He hoped that TCI would be seen as the "Monte Carlo of the Caribbean."

17. (SBU) The Premier said his government had committed to purchasing a radar system which will be able to detect vessels as soon as they leave Haitian waters. He stated that the government would equip its forces within its means. He plans to invest millions of dollars in a closed circuit television system in order to prevent crime and mentioned that the legislature is considering laws allowing wiretaps, something the DEA indicates would greatly expand drug related intelligence gathering capabilities. He mentioned that the government had banned wooden-hulled sailing sloops from ports in TCI, as U.S. law enforcement authorities had recommended in recent Joint Task Force meetings, but lacked the assets to fully enforce this ban. He expressed concern about the possibility of a mass migration from Haiti and noted that disaster preparation was an item high on his agenda. He asked for U.S. assistance with revamping the Marine Branch, suggestions about suitable vessels for the upgrades, as well as appropriate equipment and training.

WORKING TOGETHER TO COMBAT ILLEGAL DRUGS AND MIGRATION

18. (SBU) At the trilateral meeting, the Governor reviewed the issues facing TCI, including the threat of crime, illegal migration and narcotics smuggling. In discussing illegal migration, the Governor commented that there are an estimated 35,000 people living in TCI, only 10,000 of whom are "belongers," the local term for citizens. He added that TCI planned to expand its Police Force, upgrade its detention center, and was negotiating an MOU with the government of Haiti to address issues surrounding illegal Haitian migrants in TCI. Tauwhare explained that TCI has only twenty-five police officers. He mentioned that the review of the Marine Branch would recommend that it merge with Fisheries, increasing manpower to eighty-two officers. He stated that the Marine Branch currently has only two vessels. Bahamian Minister Campbell observed that The Bahamas faces challenges similar to those confronting TCI, and said the GCOB remained committed to working with the U.S. and TCI to overcome these common challenges. She pointed out that the GCOB was in the process of upgrading the capabilities of the Royal Bahamas Police Force (RBPf) and Royal Bahamas Defense Force (RBDF) through increased resources and additional assets.

19. (SBU) The Ambassador noted the importance of engaging Haiti more effectively to combat its increased role in migrant and narcotics trafficking. He said the U.S. sought to enhance the integration and coordination of assets from OPBAT, the U.S.C.G., RBDF, RBPf and the TCI Police so as to fully cover the sea lanes and make it more difficult for smugglers to use these areas to move their illicit cargos. He discussed the need for all of the law enforcement agencies that work in the area to have common communications systems so they can immediately pass along information and intelligence to their counterparts. He suggested that future meetings might usefully include representatives from the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic so that all countries in the region can develop common strategies and enhance cooperation in combating the flows of illegal drugs and migrants from Hispaniola through the Bahamas and Turks territories.

¶10. (SBU) All the parties recognized the need for better intelligence concerning migrant and drug trafficking through the region and shared ideas about how to do so. Other areas of discussion included the threats of terrorism in the region, disaster preparation, and a possible mass migration from Haiti or Cuba. The GTCI reiterated its intention to purchase an over-the-horizon radar system that will be able to detect vessels as they leave Haitian waters, and the parties discussed how information from this radar could be shared in real time and how placement of each country's assets in the area could be better coordinated.

¶11. (SBU) In concluding the meeting, the three parties -- who meet together biannually as part of the Joint Task Force of Operation Bahamas Turks and Caicos (OPBAT) -- committed themselves to continuing to work together in a close, co-operative spirit and to strengthen their individual and collective efforts to ensure the security of their borders. In particular, they agreed to: regular, real time exchanges of information on migration and drug flows in the region; exchanges of information on potential terrorist threats; developing mutual co-operation in preparing for and responding to disasters; exploring possible engagement with the Governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in future discussions; encouraging legitimate trade with Haiti while also tightening measures to prevent illegal activities. The parties to the OPBAT agreement agreed to work within the existing Joint Task Force process to develop protocols for the exchange of operational information; take forward areas of mutual assistance and co-operation including requests for training; integration of operations, and improvement of Bahamian and TCI law enforcement capabilities. Finally, the parties agreed to meet again in three months to continue to exchange information in preparation for the June Joint Task Force meeting. The Ambassador offered to host the next meeting and expressed an interest in inviting representatives from U.S. Embassies in Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince to participate in the discussions.

COMMENT

¶12. (SBU) The meetings in TCI were the most substantive and in-depth discussions we have had to date with the GTCI within the framework of their participation in OPBAT. Both the British representatives and local government officials expressed genuine concern that crime and illegal Haitian migration could threaten the luxury tourism that has become the backbone of the territory's recent economic growth. The Bahamas shares similar concerns. A strong spirit of cooperation and a willingness to share information and intelligence pervaded the discussions, and we look to the March follow-on meeting to maintain the momentum and strengthen the involvement of TCI in the consultative process we maintain with them and the GCOB through our semi-annual Joint Task Force meetings. All parties agreed that the participation of Embassies Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince in this dialogue would be useful and could serve as a prelude to engaging the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic more directly in a broader regional effort to combat the narcotics and migrant trafficking originating in Hispaniola. Embassy Nassau would welcome the participation of Embassies Santo Domingo and Port-au-Prince, including NAS officers, DEA Country Attach, and Coast Guard Liaison Officers, in the follow-up meeting tentatively scheduled for March in Nassau. We will coordinate with your offices to assess interest and availability.

HARDT